

***Presentation for October 21, 1999 Public Hearing  
Regarding Winter Use EIS***

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OCT 28 1999  
PLANNING OFFICE

My name is Bill Murdock, and I'm a Gallatin County Commissioner, from Bozeman, Montana. Our County borders the northeast corner of Yellowstone National Park. Many of our residents are park users, and we value its resources. On their behalf, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Winter Use Plan for Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and, specifically, for allowing us to participate as a cooperating county in this process.

I've just given to you a copy of our June 30, 1999 letter to the National Park Service, which I request be added to Volume II of your draft EIS, for inclusion with the other responses from Cooperating Counties and Agencies. This letter spells out in detail our concerns related to your preferred Alternative B, according to the following criteria:

- (1) **Socio-economics;**
- (2) **Visitor experience;**
- (3) **Quiet;**
- (4) **Wildlife;**
- (5) **Air and Water Quality; and**
- (6) **Park infrastructure.**

As stated in the Executive Order of February 9, 1972, it's imperative that we protect the resources of these lands, promote the safety of all users, and minimize conflicts among the various users. Today, rather than repeating to you why Gallatin County disagrees with your preferred Alternative B, I'll focus on a revised version of your original "Alternative E," which is

a workable solution we can all live with. Mr. Kruse has already explained this alternative to you in detail, and I don't need to repeat it. Because this alternative represents "adaptive planning," it's based on the principle that the process of maintaining the national parks is ongoing, one which will be dealt with here and now and for generations to come, and based on sound data and science. And it's specifically for these future generations, among other reasons, that we support Alternative E, with some modifications.

I'll address why I support this revised alternative based on the six criteria I used to argue against your Alternative B. The concern with *socio-economic effects, the first criteria*, is the main reason we were brought into this process to begin with. On page 260 of your draft plan, you outline the socio-economic effects of Alternative E. You state that there are no estimated impacts to the regional economy until "future, unspecified policy changes are implemented," and that any possible policy changes would not take place until scientific data is available upon which to base policy decisions. It is our hope that policy decisions put into place, which will affect not only visitors to the park but the people who make their living near the park, will encompass socio-economic data which can be provided to you in greater detail than what we've been able to give you to date.

In May of 1999, Gallatin County did a survey of businesses regarding the effects of winter park usage. A partial summary of the survey's responses are included in Volume II of your July 1999 Draft Winter Use Plan. I would note that, of the responses we received, the total lost sales to these businesses alone if Yellowstone National Park winter visitations were prohibited would be over \$16.7 million annually. We respectfully remind you that many park

visitors are able to plan a winter vacation in Yellowstone because they know that necessary services are available in communities like West Yellowstone.

The second criteria is "*visitor experience*." Your 1998-99 survey of Yellowstone winter visitors found support for sound and emission standards on snowmachines, more information and interpretation, stricter enforcement of rules, and more trails and locations for recreation. Alternative E would continue scientific studies of the impacts of winter visitor use upon park resources, and if determined by sound scientific evidence, selected areas or road segments would be closed if no other mitigation method was evident. Our Revised Alternative E would require subsequent review of this data by an independent, third party. Any trail or road closure would require a minimum of one year's notice by the Park Service.

Your Alternative E addresses the third criteria, "*quiet*," in a forward-thinking manner. The Advisory Committee formed under this alternative would assist with the development of new sound standards for all oversnow vehicles in the parks. With our suggested modification, the committee would include representatives from cooperating agencies; environmental groups; the National Park Service; federal, state and local governments; and the snowmobile industry. The Committee would utilize the technical expertise of all relevant sources.

**Wildlife**, our fourth criteria, is one of the top survey answers given when winter park visitors were asked what they value most about Yellowstone. Again, one of the reasons we like Alternative E is because the Advisory Committee would include representatives from the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service, and State Fish and Game in its adaptive management approach, to determine long-term impacts to wildlife and suggest solutions if necessary.

Our fifth criteria, *air and water quality*, are critical beyond measure. There's no other place in the world like Yellowstone, and it's up to all of us to maintain it. We know that snowmobiles need to be cleaner and quieter, and park users state their support for this change. We suggest that regulatory measures be adopted immediately if necessary and that, as you stated yourself, Alternative E would "greatly improve water resources" in the park.

At the Livingston meeting, we discussed our final criteria, *park infrastructure*, and suggested better utilization of existing facilities, to reduce impacts on the park's environmental resources, and to assure a quality visitor experience. We suggest dispersing winter visitor services throughout the park, for example at Canyon and Grants Village, and utilizing the existing infrastructure in the park's gateway communities, such as West Yellowstone.

In summary, I stress again that an adaptive approach to maintaining the parks is far more healthy and far-sighted than plowing the road to Old Faithful. Two wrongs do not make a right. We realize that the existing state of affairs is not acceptable, and want to build upon your idea of an inclusive, advisory committee which would facilitate long-term solutions for our park.

Thank you for listening.

**GALLATIN COUNTY, MONTANA—COMMISSIONER BILL MURDOCK***(See also Responses to Paul Kruse, Representative of Cooperating Counties)*

Re: Reference to letter of June 30, 1999 spelling out concerns relating to Preferred Alternative B. See responses to letter from Gallatin County.